

in that age, though prophetic of the future. He shut himself up at Cooling Castle and refused to obey, until the King's writ for his arrest arrived. Then he surrendered. The royal officers produced him before the Bishops in St. Paul's Chapter House, the scene of Wycliffe's trial in 1377. Oldcastle made a bold confession of faith, denounced the misuse of images and pilgrimages, and rejected both Transubstantiation and the necessity of auricular confession. On these grounds he was proclaimed a heretic and handed over to the secular arm. The King, with whom lay the duty of burning the condemned man, gave Oldcastle forty days' respite, an interval which he used to escape from the Tower and call his co-religionists to arms in defence of conscience. The Lollards thought that the situation required violent measures. Although they had long been subjected to persecution, they had hitherto possessed strongholds in the houses of powerful sympathisers ; but if once they lost such guardians as Oldcastle, woods and caves would be their sole refuge. Their decision to rise in arms was unwise and wrong, not because they owed particular loyalty to a line which had usurped the throne only thirteen years before, but because, with small resources and few supporters, they could never hope to establish a government, or do anything more than throw the kingdom into confusion. But it is idle for armchair philosophers, living in the nineteenth century with the old-established privilege of believing or disbelieving in any religion as they choose, to condemn as fools and knaves men who dared to stake their lives and fortunes on one desperate throw for freedom of conscience. They cared intensely for the mission that they had undertaken, they believed (and with reason) that little good would come until it had succeeded, they saw that the existing government was determined to crush it, so they determined to be beforehand and to crush the government.

The attempt proved a fiasco, though it demonstrated the numbers and zeal of the Lollard party in the Home Counties. A plot to seize the King at Eltham was discovered. It was planned to effect a *coup d'Etat* by the junction of bands of Lollards from town and country on St. Giles' Fields between London and Westminster. This also was frustrated by